

Introduction: De/Re-constructing the political: How do critical approaches to ‘security’ frame our understanding of the political?

The problematic of the intersections between politics and security is at the heart of critical security studies (henceforth CSS), yet often under-theorized or naturalized in our field. How do the seeming opposites of ‘politics’ and ‘security’ intersect; what do their intersections produce; and what does this tell us about *how* politics and security are produced? These questions are central to this special issue and have been key to the development of CSS, which during the last 20 years has grown exponentially. CSS incorporates today a large repertoire of issues and approaches, whilst continuously developing new frameworks for analysis such as risk (Aradau and Van Munster 2007; Lobo-Guerrero 2007; Security Dialogue special issue 2008), resilience (Duffield 2012; Evans and Reid 2014; Walker and Cooper 2011), biopolitics and governmentality (Bigo 2002; Dillon 2007; Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008) as well as the analyses of exceptionalism and state of emergency (Dillon 2007; Huysmans 2004, 2008; Neal 2006, 2012), to name just some of the prime suspects. By now, these have become hallmarks of the sub-field we work in and part of a growing text-book scholarship we use to tell students the story and ‘evolution’ of CSS (e.g. Jarvis and Holland 2014; Peoples and Vaughn-Williams 2010/14; Mutimer 2013; Shepherd 2013).

We suggest, however, that nowadays the political-critical aspect in CSS is often ignored, at times essentialized, or perhaps left for the reader to consider themselves. There is still a separation of ‘security’ from ‘politics’, as Aradau (2004) argued with respect to securitization theory over a decade ago, and this works to sideline a crucial concern for CSS: that of nuanced critique geared at political re-imagination. We propose, therefore, that while CSS holds the potential for clearer investigations of the links between in/security practices

and articulations in the wider context of politics, the critical-political dimension is often under-explored or perhaps taken-for-granted.

This special issue thus picks up on recent interventions on the relationship between the political and the critical in the subfield of CSS (e.g. Browning and McDonald 2011; Hynek and Chandler 2013; Mustapha 2013; Nunes 2012), as we seek to open up a space for deconstructing and at the same time re-imagining the political through a critical reading of in/security. In contrast to Hynek and Chandler's (2013: 46) recent provocation '... that we should stop appending 'Critical' to 'Security Studies'', or as their paper's title clearly states: 'No emancipatory alternative, no critical security studies', we argue that adhering rigidly to an emancipatory approach to security as the only 'authentic' way to do CSS (Booth 1991; Wyn-Jones 1999) is restrictive (see especially Åhäll, Montesinos Coleman and Rosenow, and Wibben in this issue). According to Hynek and Chandler, criticality requires alternatives, a clear engagement with immanent critique. We, on the other hand, maintain that their approach subscribes to a 'strong ontology' approach (Mustapha 2013) that prevents us from interrogating the politics of security. Alternatively, we argue that the ability to engage productively in transformation and re-imagination must begin with the unpacking, denaturalization and interrogation of existing power constellations. Politics and security cannot be separated and, hence, a direct engagement with the politics and political implications of security practices or acts ought to be unearthed (Huysmans 2011).

In this special issue, we explore and flesh out the relationships between in/security practices and the political, broadly defined, as well as reflect on how 'thinking critically' can help us transform and reimagine the political. Three key questions guide our issue: Does CSS lend itself to more radical approaches to transforming the social and political spheres? Is/Should CSS be seen as a political project? What can it teach us about the relation between security and politics that mainstream approaches cannot?

Our contributors take these questions as their starting point and offer some provocative suggestions. Annick Wibben proposes that an ‘opening’ of security, rather than merely ‘broadening’ and ‘deepening’ (Krause and Williams 1996), is sorely needed. She argues that in both mainstream and critical studies of security the notion of security is often taken as given, that is, ‘an identifiable, achievable good – a thing’. Drawing on feminist as well as poststructuralist and postcolonial readings, Wibben suggests tracing the politics of security as enacted and performed, highlighting that this inherently is political re-imagination.

Indeed, the murky linkages between security and politics are unearthed by Linda Åhäll, also writing in the tradition of feminist scholarship. To Åhäll a feminist security studies approach can assist us in opening up the space for critique, contestation and indeed emancipation. She demonstrates this through a discourse- and visual-analytical interrogation of Remembrance Week 2013 in the UK and the problematics of commemoration and militarization in the everyday. Drawing on Mustapha’s (2013) ‘weak ontologies’ she shows how a poststructuralist feminist reading of militarization and commemoration is political.

Renée Marlin-Bennett continues this line of inquiry into the everyday as she enquires into the politics of new security technologies and systems of control. Her focus is on everyday practices of insecurity as manifested in the control over embodied information, specifically anti-money laundering/counter-terrorist financing [AML/CTF] and radio frequency identification [RFID] tags. Marlin-Bennett’s contribution thus demonstrates how control over information flows to and from our bodies often goes unnoticed even while it renders us all vulnerable subjects. The criticality here is thus to expose such occluded instances of power and flesh-out their political implications.

How critical approaches can tackle sedimented assumptions about the congruency of the body-national/social and how this is key to better understanding biopolitical practices of exclusion is also the topic of Moran Mandelbaum’s intervention. In his contribution he demonstrates how a psychoanalytical approach to the study of in/security can help us

problematize contemporary practices of congruency and homogenization, suggesting that we read practices of congruency as fantasmatic and thus political in nature, rather than as given facts. He further shows that unravelling the ethico-political is key to the critical study of security.

Finally, Lara Montesinos Coleman and Doerthe Rosenow argue that, despite concerns to address an ever-expanding range of practices in CSS, the ongoing preoccupation with security tacitly reproduces modern, liberal ontologies. Even post-structuralist CSS, which embodies desires to unravel liberal preoccupations with security, ends up recentring security as the result of an ‘ideological fetishism’. Arguing that struggles over dispossession and repression expose violences invisible through the security/insecurity framework, Coleman and Rosenow suggest taking ‘struggle’ as an analytical starting point for critical engagement with power and order.

Our aim for this explicit re-linking of CSS with the practice, discourse, strategy and theory of politics, and the political, is to re-evaluate what it is about critical approaches to security that makes them *critical*. A key concern, therefore, is to explore the connections between security and politics as they manifest in different perspectives on and approaches to the critical study of security. The contributions to this special issue offer different interrogations of the critical and political aspects of contemporary in/security discourses and practices as the contributors approach these through myriad lenses such as gender and feminism, the everyday, the body, struggle, discourse analysis and psychoanalysis. This special issue thus (re-)starts a conversation on the politics of critical scholarship and seeks to provide an assessment of the current political state of play in our field as we know it. We hope that it will promote lively debate.

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